Title of Paper: *Kipling’s Holy Paternalism: Buddhist-Imperial Hierarchies in Kim*

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Abstract:
In *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, David Cannadine argues that studies of the Victorian British Empire tend to focus too closely on the ways the British othered and exoticized their colonial subjects. In fact, the British concerned themselves with constructing “affinities” with their imperial subjects as least as much as they attended to the differences between themselves and others (xix). The notion of social hierarchy represented an especially important way by which affinities between the metropole and the periphery were constructed in the late Victorian Empire.

Rudyard Kipling’s 1901 novel, *KIM*, presents a view of the Victorian Empire as both exporting English hierarchy onto India as well as integrating an indigenous hierarchy with England’s own. The novel supports the notion that the British found a hierarchical structure analogous to its own in India, though, I argue, not in the caste system, as is often presumed. The paper proposes that instead of finding a sympathetic social structure in the Indian present, *KIM* suggests that the British found what they were looking for in a buried Indian past, characterized by an ancient and forgotten Buddhist heritage.

Keywords:
*KIM; Rudyard Kipling; Buddhism; Social Hierarchy; British Empire*

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In *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, David Cannadine argues that studies of the Victorian British Empire tend to focus too closely on the ways the British othered and exoticized their colonial subjects. In fact, the British concerned themselves with constructing "affinities" with their imperial subjects as least as much as they attended to the differences between themselves and others (xix). The notion of social hierarchy represented an especially important way by which affinities between the metropole and the periphery were constructed in the late-Victorian Empire: since "Britons generally conceived of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered gradations...hallowed by time and precedent [and] sanctioned by tradition and religion," it was from such a starting point that they "contemplated and tried to comprehend the distant realms and diverse society of their empire" (4). Thus, a key aspect of the British imperial project during the Victorian period was its exportation of a complex hierarchical social structure modeled on Britain's own to an overseas dominion. If a dominion happened already to have a hierarchy in place, the Empire's challenge consisted of integrating the models into a synchronized but highly stratified whole.

*Ornamentalism* devotes one chapter to the unique case of India. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British method for ruling India shifted from the first approach mentioned above (exportation) to the second (integration and synchronization) (Cannadine 41). Imperial administrators began to look more closely at the "Brahmanic theory of caste," which was becoming more "rigidified" and more widespread throughout South Asia, penetrating into and restructuring "the relations of public worship, physical mobility, marriage, and inheritance." The British began to "look upon caste as 'the essential feature of the Indian social system', [and] as the analogue to their own carefully ranked domestic status hierarchy, which seemed to make Indian society familiar" (42). In 1901, a census was instituted that made caste "official." The British came to view the dominance of caste as indicative of Indian society as "ancient," "organic," "orderly," "traditional," village-oriented, and "timeless"—the very embodiment of an "Englishness" that was slipping away back home (42-43).

The essential Englishness of India, Cannadine continues, was the vision of India that Rudyard Kipling and other writers "evoked, celebrated and popularized" (42-43). 1901, apart from being the year of caste-driven census-taking, saw the publication of Kipling's *Kim*, a novel which, though clearly preoccupied with the question of hierarchy in India, gives us a rather different picture of the way hierarchy functioned in the British imagination of India than the picture that Cannadine gives. Cannadine's theory that the British wanted to find in Indian society an analogue to their own domestic status hierarchy provides a helpful context in which to situate Kipling's slippery and elusive

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1 It is unclear in his brief discussion of this topic whether Cannadine believes the rigidification and penetration of caste philosophy into all areas of South Asian life was brought about mainly by indigenous factors or British involvement, or whether it was the result of contact between the two.
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novel. But this essay argues that instead of finding such an analogue in the Indian present, characterized by the increasingly-dominant caste system, the novel proposes that the British found what they were looking for in a buried Indian past characterized by Buddhism, a religion which, by the thirteenth century, had all but vanished from India.

*Kim* presents a vision of India in the late nineteenth century that emphasizes India’s disorderliness, violence, instability, and oddly enough, its democratic nature, despite the growing importance of caste. Kipling’s novel portrays a caste system ineffective at establishing feelings of mutual aid or reciprocity between members of different castes. As a social model, *Kim*’s caste system proves too divisive to foster a sense of the common good, and its inclusiveness (the fact that every individual has a place in a single system) fails to promote unity. Despite its pessimism about the Indian present, however, the novel locates some hope for a unified, orderly, stable, and cohesive future in India’s past as represented by Buddhism. The novel presents Buddhism, a religion revived by British archaeologists as part of the nineteenth century’s colonial project, as not only an ancient period in India’s past, but as representative of precisely the organic, orderly, traditional, and timeless hierarchical social order that Cannadine characterizes as the embodiment of Englishness.

In terms of Cannadine’s framework, the novel presents the British imperial project as both exporting (or imposing) hierarchy onto India, as well as integrating an indigenous hierarchy into their own. The past, configured as Buddhism, is literally excavated by, as well as aligned with, the future, as represented by British rule in India. Past and future, synthesized on the conception of hierarchical order, combine to tame the present. This essay works out the several ways in which Buddhism and British imperialism overlap on the question of hierarchy in *Kim*, and it proposes that the novel ultimately obviates the need for Kim to choose between his allegiance to the two systems, offering instead the possibility that his rank in one makes him especially fit for his station in the other. *Kim* projects a vision of India that can return to the spirit of its ancient Buddhist origins under the masterful hand of the British Empire.

When we first meet Kim, he is sitting astride the Zam-Zammah playing a game of “king-of-the-castle” with his two Indian friends, Chota Lal (a Hindu) and Abdullah (a Muslim). The Indian boys want Kim to get off the cannon so that they can each take their turns, but Kim refuses to give up his position, answering their complaints by saying that “All Mussalmans fell off Zam-Zammah long ago,” as did the Hindus, for “the Mussalmans pushed them off” (4). The boys’ play uses the language of imperialism and recreates the history of invasion and conquest of the subcontinent. We are immediately alerted to the pervasive presence of the gaming mentality in the lives of the novel’s characters, and the sinister side of the boys’ friendly play alludes to the high stakes that gaming can take when it
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happens to be played with enemies. The narrator remarks that the Indian boys are both of higher class status than the orphaned Kim: Abdullah is the “sweetmeat-seller’s son” (3) and Chota Lal’s father “was worth perhaps half a million sterling” (4). Still, the boys are able to enjoy each other’s company because, the narrator tells us, “India is the only democratic land in the world” (4).

It might seem strange to call India at the turn of the century “democratic,” and Kipling surely means us to raise an eyebrow. But the India represented in *Kim* does, on the whole, take the shape of a sprawling mosaic or the complex patterns of an oriental rug more often than it does the vertical hierarchy that its caste system suggests. Kipling’s India is diversity as spectacle, a delightful carnival of difference on display. Caste, ethnicity, religion, and class fascinate because of the color they provide; only secondarily, it seems, do they function as rank distinctions. Passages in which we look down at the Grand Trunk Road from an embankment and see, through Kim’s eyes, “all India spread out to left and right,” emphasize the way in which the novel flattens the caste system into “little clumps of red and blue and pink and white and saffron” (63).

And yet, there seems to be something inherently violent about this spectacular mosaic. Its disparate parts, regarded from a distance, make up a beautiful image, but from a closer view, the parts threaten to fly apart at the seams. As Kim and the Lama come down from the embankment of the previous passage, along with an old Indian soldier who has traveled with them by train to Umballa, they witness an argument between a young Indian officer on horseback and a low-caste carter:

“Son of a swine, is the soft part of the road meant for thee to scratch thy back upon? Father of all the daughters of shame and husband of ten thousand virtueless ones, thy mother was devoted to a devil, being led thereto by her mother; thy aunts have never had a nose for seven generations! [...]”

The voice and a venomous whip-cracking came out of a pillar of dust fifty yards away, where a cart had broken down. A thin, high Kattiwar mare, with eyes and nostrils aflame, rocketed out of the jam, snorting and wincing as her rider bent her across the road in chase of a shouting man. He was tall and gray-bearded, sitting the almost mad beast as a piece of her, and scientifically lashing his victim between plunges.

The old man’s face lit with pride. ‘My child!’ said he briefly [...] ‘Am I to be beaten before the police?’ cried the carter. ‘Justice! I will have Justice--’ [...] The carter ran under the wheels of his cart and thence threatened all sorts of vengeance. [...]  

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2 In his chapter on *Kim* in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said also comments on how the “boyish pleasure” celebrated by the novel does not contradict the overall political purpose of British control over India (or over its other overseas dominions). Said connects *Kim*’s “mixture of fun and single-minded political seriousness” with Lord Baden-Powell’s concept of “boyology,” which deeply influenced the latter’s creation of the Boy Scouts (137).
The horseman delivered one last vicious cut with his whip and came on at a canter. 'My father!' He reigned back ten yards and dismounted. The old man was off his pony in an instant, and they embraced as do father and son in the East. (57-8)

Earlier, the Lama refers to the Grand Trunk Road as the “the backbone of all Hind,” which, read alongside the passage above, suggests that just as the Road is essential to the social and economic body of India, so are such moments of violence as these that reinforce the separation of castes and classes. The lack of justice for the carter and his vow of revenge, however futile, indicate an inherent instability in the social relations between members of the Indian organic system. At the very least, such relations are marked by the complete lack of fellow-feeling and sympathy that would seem to be necessary to the existence of a strong, balanced, and stable organic society. The separation of distinct groups and ranks overwhelms any sense of mutual aid or reciprocal duty. However, the same act of violence that destroys caste and class unity serves to reunite father and son. The narrator draws attention to the fact that the embrace is a peculiarly eastern display of affection, and that easterners may be capable of extreme closeness as well as extreme antagonism. The caste system as social model, informed by a history of violence that underpins everything from children’s games to the backbone of the nation, seems ill-equipped to hold together its disorderly population, no matter how pleasing the disorder may look from a bird’s-eye view.

In contrast to India’s chaotic present as depicted by the Grand Trunk Road, the novel presents a vision of a peaceful, harmonious, and stable Indian past in the form of Buddhism. J. Jeffrey Franklin, in his study of Buddhism and the British Empire, writes that by the eighteenth century, the physical traces of Buddhism in India had been erased, demolished, covered, or dismantled. “Only after the British invasion and occupation of India were the origins of Buddhism rediscovered, unearthed, cataloged, and either restored or carted off to museums” (141). Thus, “military engineers and East India Company surveyors, represented in *Kim* by Colonel Creighton, were the first Orientalist scholars and amateur archaeologists to rediscover many of the ancient sites of Buddhism” (141). As part of its appropriation of India, the British Empire recovered the historical roots of Buddhism that had long been forgotten by most of the Indian population. Furthermore, most of the significant finds of ancient sites and other archaeological discoveries occurred in the last half of the nineteenth century, when Kipling was growing up and working in India (141-2).

The novel portrays the Lahore Museum where Kipling’s father, Lockwood, worked as curator, as a “Wonder House,” filled with a carefully organized taxonomy of ancient Buddhist art. The entrance to the building is guarded by the “figures of Greco-Buddhist sculptures done...by forgotten workmen,” and inside sit “hundreds of pieces, friezes of figures in relief, fragments of statues and slabs crowded with figures that had encrusted the brick walls of...the North Country...now, dug up and labeled, made the pride of the Museum” (6). While
being given a tour of these pieces and fragments by the curator, the Lama lingers in front of one particular image to which he is especially drawn:

In open-mouthed wonder the Lama turned to this and that, and finally checked in rapt attention before a large alto-relief representing a coronation or apotheosis of the Lord Buddha. The Master was represented seated on a lotus the petals of which were so deeply undercut as to show almost detached. Round Him was an adoring hierarchy of kings, elders, and old-time Buddhas. Below were lotus-covered waters with fishes and waterbirds. Two butterfly-winged dewas held a wreath over His head; above them another pair supported an umbrella surmounted by the jeweled headdress of the Bodhisat. (6)

The image of India's past, here symbolized by Buddhist cosmology, is that of a bucolic hierarchical social order. The cosmic and natural worlds are in alignment—all beings hold a position in a vertically-oriented paradigm: Sakyamuni Buddha sits at the top of chain; kings, elders, and previous Buddhas take their assigned seats around him; and finally, below and surrounding them, the animals and other cosmic beings gather. All pay tribute to one benevolent master. It is an image of absolute peace and stability.

Franklin reads this and other scenes in the Wonder House when the Lama meditates nostalgically on the beauty and the loss of ancient Buddhism as Kipling's attempt to collapse the British archaeological enterprise with the Buddhist pilgrimage experience. He writes:

Far from immune to the romantic aspects of the archaeological treasure hunt, Kipling enlisted some of that romance in the character not only of the Curator but especially of the Lama....The Lama's search for the River of the Arrow might be read as a re-Orientalized transposition of the archaeological mission narrative....In place of the Western archaeologist, Kipling has substituted the Buddhist pilgrim come to recover his religion's heritage. This represents both an erasure of European intervention and a desire to return to Buddhists their own history. (142)

I want to suggest that it is more important to notice that the caretaker of India's peaceful Buddhist past is not the Buddhist pilgrim, but the intelligent and pacific curator-Sahib. Far from an erasure of European intervention, the Wonder House passages insist that it is European intervention that allows for Buddhist pilgrimage to exist. By extension, it is European intervention that will reestablish an orderly, hierarchical social model that will bring about peace in India, and perhaps, if we read the alto-relief literally, even on earth. India's future, in the form of British imperialism, is the caretaker of India's past, and it is on the basis of hierarchy that the future has established a continuous link with the past. Thus, India's disorderly present is imagined by the novel to be sandwiched between an organic Buddhist past and an orderly future as part of the British Empire. Though it portrays the caste system as inept, the novel does not promote a vision of egalitarian classlessness for India's future. On the contrary, it wants to bring
the past into harmony with the future on the basis of hierarchy, all for the purpose of taming the present.

Another way of approaching the question of how the novel creates a parallel or suggests an overlap between India’s past and future, configured as Buddhism and Empire, might be to focus on the similarities between the curator and the Lama. The scenes in the Wonder House stress not only the friendship that develops between the two men as scholars and “priests,” but also the way that both can be seen as artisan figures who collaborate in the project of using the past to craft the present into a more stable future. It is important, however, to note that the one who takes the lead in the collaboration (the “small master” or “elite artisan,” to continue the artisanal metaphor) is the British character. At the end of the museum tour, the curator gives the Lama a notebook of fine white paper, some pencils, and his own spectacles, which, being made of crystal, are of much better quality than the Lama’s own. The curator explains the reasoning behind his gift by saying to the Lama, “We be craftsmen together, thou and I” (11). Perhaps not quite understanding what the curator means at first, the Lama accepts the gifts “as a sign of friendship between priest and priest” (12). But when the Lama gives the curator his pencase in exchange for the British objects, he repeats the curator’s words, directing them back at the British man: “We be craftsmen together, thou and I” (12).

I do not want to go so far as to suggest that the Lama is consciously in cahoots with the curator, and by extension, with British imperialism. But his echo of the curator’s words could be read as an indication of the malleability of Buddhism under British control. In an earlier moment in the museum, the curator shows the Lama a “mighty map” identifying not only the holy places of Buddhism, but also the reach of the British Empire in Asia. The narrator explains that the Lama’s “brown finger followed the curator’s pencil from point to point” (8). Just as the Buddhist voice is made to echo the English voice, here the brown finger follows the mark made by the white hand. We might say, then, that the Lama is unknowingly complicit in the imperialist project, and that despite his foreign origins, he fits nicely into the rank of scholar, archaeologist, or curator in the hierarchy of the British Raj.

In all of the Wonder House passages, the overlap between Buddhism and British imperialism is located in the way that both foreground the importance of hierarchy to bring about a peaceful organic social body. The novel’s mobilization of the sympathetic artisan figure as leader also suggests that Kipling’s ideal leadership style is one that harmonizes the head and the hand, or the paternal ideals of empire and the masterful execution of those ideals. By depicting India’s

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3 My reading of this scene dovetails with Said’s. He writes:

It is the greatness of his achievement that quite without selling the old man short or in any way diminishing the quaint sincerity of his Search, Kipling nevertheless firmly places him within the protective orbit of British rule in India. This is symbolized in Chapter 1, when the elderly British museum curator gives the Abbot [of Such-zen] his spectacles, thus adding to the man’s spiritual prestige and authority, consolidating the justness and legitimacy of Britain’s benevolent sway. (139)
present as the inheritance of an indigenous history of violence, and by suggesting that a more benign Indian prehistory can be unearthed by the appropriate hand, Kipling makes the correlation between past, future, and hierarchy explicit.

In addition to looking at the artisanal figure as a locus for the overlap of Buddhism and imperialism, we might also look at how the novel addresses the issue of paternal relations through father figures. Kim has many father figures; in fact, he seems to pick them up wherever he goes. He has Sahibian father figures, including Lurgan, the gem-dealer and spy-trainer; Colonel Creighton, a British ethnographer who occupies a high position in the espionage ring’s chain of command; and Father Victor, the pluralistic but ineffective Catholic priest. There is also, perhaps, an anti-father figure in the character of Mr. Bennett, the Mavericks’ Anglican chaplain. Kim also has Indian father figures that represent the two major religious groups in India: Mahbub Ali, the Muslim horse-trader; and Huree Babu, whose Hinduism is really a jumbled hodge-podge of all the different faiths to be found in India. And most importantly, there is the Lama.

All of these paternal figures stand in for Kim’s absent biological father, Kimball O’Hara the first, who is dead before the novel begins and arguably harms his son without even being present by delivering him through prophecy into the hands of Bennett and Victor. The novel’s preoccupation with chosen, adopted, and non-biological paternity is another gesture toward the author’s desire for a paternalist British colonial rule in India that usurps the natural or indigenous rule. But what is even more interesting is the way in which these adoptive father/son relationships inquire into the reciprocal duties and obligations of benefactors and beneficiaries. Some of these father/son pairings reveal surprising similarities between the Buddhist Lama/chela (or guru/disciple) relationship and the relationship between teacher and student of espionage tactics. The points of connection between these relationships further the possibility of the novel’s positioning of Buddhism and imperialism as overlapping hierarchical models. I want to look closely at the relationships between Kim and the Lama, on one hand, and Kim and Lurgan, on the other, to bear out this point.

Of all of Kim’s father figures, the Lama is the one whose guidance seems to be the most beneficial and the least harmful to both parties. Their relationship is one of benefactor and beneficiary based on the Buddhist merit economy. Kim has certain obligations and duties as a chela: he begs food for the Lama, guards his honor, and cares for his physical safety. Likewise, the Lama has certain obligations and duties as a master: he pays for Kim’s education at St. Xavier’s and he forgoes Nirvana to help Kim along toward deliverance from the Wheel. Both of them earn merit for their beneficial deeds towards each other, but neither of them performs these deeds out of pure altruism. The Lama becomes Kim’s financial benefactor because he believes it will earn him the merit he needs to find the River. Kim becomes the Lama’s protector and personal assistant in order to travel with the Lama through India and enjoy the aesthetic pleasure of an exciting landscape. They alternate between the roles of benefactor and beneficiary and take turns giving and receiving benefits.
The relationship between Kim and the Lama is one in which reciprocal obligations and duties result in genuine love and affection. Franklin writes that most critical readings of this relationship fall into one of two camps: they either celebrate the redeeming quality of love between Kim and the Lama as the ultimate moral of the novel, or take issue with the way that love masks the insidiousness of the system of power in which Kim and the Lama are both trapped (138). It seems to me that the redemptive love between the two characters can be read not only as the ultimate moral of the novel, but also as what, for Kipling, could and should be the foundation for the imperial system of power that encompasses them both. Kipling wants British imperial rule in Asia, but on the order of a beneficial paternalism that need not go so far as to be altruistic, but which operates according to an economy of reciprocal benefits that results in a genuine fellow-feeling.

One of the most important aspects of a Lama's relationship to his chela is to teach him how to recognize the difference between truth and illusion. The Lama frequently invokes the truth/illusion dichotomy in his conversations with Kim. When Kim sees the sign of the red bull on a green plain prophesied by his father in the form of the regimental flag of the Irish Mavericks, the Lama tries to persuade Kim that what he thinks is a genuine sign is in fact just an illusion (80). We might infer that the Lama interprets the flag as a fallacious sign because he desires Kim to stay with him and accompany him on his search for the River. Indeed, later, the Lama will couch his own attachment to Kim as an illusion, first in Victor's and Bennett's tent (92) and then at the entrance to St. Xavier's (123). For the Lama, his attachment to Kim is part and parcel with his attachment to the visible world, which Buddhist doctrine tells him is merely “shadow changing to another shadow” (270). Even time and space, as well as the body itself, with its attendant pains, are illusive (271).

The Lama's ambition in life is the recognition and severance of his soul from all illusion. Yet, the novel also suggests that Buddhist philosophy can recognize the advantages as well as the disadvantages of illusion. When Kim is released from St. Xavier's and reunites with the Lama, Kim asks the Lama in veiled language about how to manage his dual responsibilities of chela and novice secret agent:

‘At the Gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbecoming a Sahib. And I am a Sahib.’

‘Friend of all the World,’—the lama looked directly at Kim—‘I am an old man—pleased with shows as are children. To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking escape. No matter what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs, when we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion—at my side. Hai! My bones ache for that River, as they ached in the te-rain; but my spirit sits above my bones, waiting. The Search is sure!’

‘I am answered. Is it permitted to ask a question?’

The lama inclined his stately head.
‘I ate thy bread for three years—as thou knowest. Holy One, whence came—?’

‘There is much wealth, as men count it, in Bhotiyal,’ the lama returned with composure. ‘In my own place I have the illusion of honour. I ask for that I need. I am not concerned with the account. That is for my monastery. Ai! The black high seats in the monastery, and novices all in order!’ (212)

The Lama assuages Kim’s concern about his double life with a typically non-dualistic Buddhist response: all sentient beings are equal, there is no such thing as race or religion in the true state of things, and thus there is ultimately no real conflict between his secular and religious roles. All division is illusive and should be overcome. However, illusion can also benefit one when he occupies a position of power. In his monastery, the Lama is near the top of the social hierarchy, and so is able to make requests on behalf of his chela because of his rank. The Lama’s illusion of high station allows him to be a benefactor for Kim, which in turn allows him to acquire the merit he needs to find the River, thus closing the circle that begins and ends with illusion.

Lurgan also understands the advantages and disadvantages of illusion, and tries to educate Kim on both fronts. Like his relationship with the Lama, Kim’s relationship with Lurgan is also based on a merit economy. One of Lurgan’s first tasks for Kim is a memory-training exercise known as the “Jewel Game.” At first, Kim is rather incompetent at recalling details about the jewels on the covered tray. He can only remember the colors and shapes of the stones, whereas his little Hindu competitor can recall not only minute details, but weights and origins. For ten days thereafter, Kim lives with Lurgan in his shop, playing the game everyday with jewels as well as weapons and photographs of natives (158). As Kim gains proficiency, he earns merit toward becoming a bona fide “chain-man” in the Great Game (161). Impressed with his improvement, Lurgan remarks: “From time to time, God causes men to be born—and thou art one of them—who have a lust to go abroad at the risk of their lives and discover news....These souls are very few; and of these few, not more than ten are of the best” (161). Lurgan establishes a hierarchy of agents in the Great Game, all of whom are already above the rank of ordinary human beings. Kim likes that “Lurgan Sahib had spoken most explicitly of the reward that would follow obedience,” and hopes that one day, he will “enjoy the dignity of a letter and a number—and a price upon his head” (161-62).

But Kim spends most of his time with Lurgan perfecting his natural ability to see through other people’s illusions and to make his own undetectable. When Kim first arrives at the gem shop, Lurgan tries to play a smoke-and-mirrors trick on him. He makes a jar of water materialize out of thin air, a feat that Kim describes as “magic” (153). When Kim throws the jar back at Lurgan at his request, it shatters into tiny pieces. Lurgan tries to convince Kim that he sees the jar piecing itself back together (“Look! It is coming into shape”), but Kim does not take the bait (154). Thoroughly impressed, Lurgan remarks, “you are the first of a many who has ever seen it so [in its true form]. You are the first that ever saved
himself. I wish I knew what it was that...But you are right. You should not tell
that—not even to me” (155). During the hours when he is not practicing the
Jewel Game, Kim hones his natural ability to detect illusions under Lurgan’s
guidance by spying on Lurgan’s visitors and giving him an account of their “real
errand[s]” (159). In addition, he develops his innate shape-shifting abilities by
playing “dressing-up,” learning how to paint his own face, and adopting the
manners and speech of all castes (159).

The roles of benefactor and beneficiary seem to be more rigid in Lurgan’s
and Kim’s case: there exists less reciprocal sacrifice and deep affection between
them as compared to the connection between Kim and the Lama. Still, we might
say that Kim benefits Lurgan by reflecting well on his teaching, and Lurgan is not
completely altruistic for he acquires respect from the other Game players for
producing a top-notch agent. There is also a way in which the novel makes
possible a symbolic Buddhist reading of the imperialist father/son relationship.
Lurgan’s occupation as a gem dealer recalls the mantra that the Lama intones
while moving the beads on his rosary, “‘Om mane pudme hum! Om mane pudme
hum!’” (33). Alan Sandison’s note to the Oxford edition explains that the usual
translation of the prayer is “Hail to the jewel in the Lotus” (296), the jewel being
representative of the Buddha.

Furthermore, the jewel game as memory-training exercise implies a
connection to the figure of Ananda, the Buddha’s best disciple, whose merit is
due largely to his unparalleled capacity for remembering the Buddha’s sermons
and repeating them to be transcribed into sutras after the Buddha’s death.4
Ananda is mentioned three times in the novel. The first is during the Lama’s
“wonderful Buddhist invocation” that he utters in the Wonder House, which is
actually a stanza from Kipling’s own poem, “Buddha at Kamakura” (1892):

‘To Him the Way—the Law—Apart—
Whom Maya held beneath her heart
Ananda’s Lord—the Bodhisat.’ (Kim 7)

The second is in the Lama’s story of the elephant with the leg-iron. The elephant,
an avatar of Ananda, adopts an orphaned baby elephant that is eventually
revealed to be the Buddha himself—the allusion to the orphaned Kim is explicit.5
The third mention is through one of the Lama’s many expressions of love to Kim:
“Never was such a chela. I doubt at times whether Ananda more faithfully nursed
Our Lord” (270).

Though the figures of Ananda and the Buddha most obviously map onto
Kim and the Lama (or the reverse, as in the elephant story) the text makes

4 Ananda is sometimes referred to as the “guardian” of the Dharma (Dhamma), or Buddhist
Law. See, for instance, Hellmuth Hecker’s chapter, “Ānanda: Guardian of the Dhamma,” in
Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker, Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works,
Their Legacy (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003). If Kim can be read to some extent as the
second coming of Ananda, then the future guardian of Buddhist Law would also be a future guardian of
Britain’s rule over India. Interestingly, when Charles Bennett, the first British Buddhist monk, took his
vows (in 1901) he was renamed Ananda Metteyya (Franklin 212).

5 I have included the full tale as it appears in Kim as an appendix to this essay.
possible the association of these figures with Lurgan through the tropes of jewels, memory, and illusions. Lurgan the imperial spy becomes part of Buddhist mythology. It is possible to read him either as a manifestation of these spiritual presences in the physical world, or as a vehicle for a grand plan that he does not understand. The latter reading, in a way, is the more provocative, for it implies a striking parallel between him and the Lama, who is also implicated in the Great Game, a grand plan that he understands as little as Lurgan does Buddhism. The potential for a character that ostensibly belongs in the system of the Game to be read as part of the system of the Way is another instance of overlap between imperialism and Buddhism on the matter of hierarchy, configured here in terms of paternal relations.

The novel, like Lurgan, performs a kind of sorcery in the form of what seems like cosmic integration that joins the systems of Buddhism and the Great Game on the issue of hierarchy. Lurgan’s water jar trick depends on making a thing that is broken or fragmented seem whole and unified. Likewise, the novel is invested in resolving the seemingly intractable contradiction between Kim’s identity as a spy and a Buddhist disciple. Near the end of the book, Kim, fighting off pangs of guilt, leads the Lama into dangerous territory in order to intercept some documents from enemy agents. Traveling through the Himalayan foothills, Kim is torn between his love for the Lama and his allegiance to Hurree Babu (who keeps popping up in various disguises along the trail), two father figures whose plans for Kim seem to be mutually exclusive. As a cover for carrying out his duties in the Game, Kim persuades the Lama that going north will help them to find the River. When the two come upon the enemy spies, a scuffle breaks out when the Russian spy reaches for the Lama’s drawing of the Wheel of Life, rips it, then strikes the Lama when he believes the old man is reaching for a weapon. In a fit of impulsive anger, Kim knocks the Russian off balance, and the two go tumbling down the hill, with Hurree and the Frenchman hot on their heels. Hurree tells Kim that he will “rescue” the two spies while Kim returns to their tent to steal the documents (242-250).

When he arrives at the tent, Kim reflects on the downright magical way the night has played itself out: “this collapse of their [the enemy spies’] Great Game (Kim wondered to whom they would report it), this panicky bolt into the night, had come about through no craft of Hurree’s or contrivance of Kim’s, but simply, beautifully, and inevitably” (248). What seemed to be a chance occurrence, or in the Buddhist framework, Kim’s failure at controlling his emotions in the face of a powerful illusion, somehow brings about the most desirable outcome for both the Great Game and the Lama’s search. The British Gamers recover the documents and the Lama interprets the incident as a sign that he has strayed from the correct path, a realization which eventually leads him to the River. Performing the duties of his position in the hierarchy of the Game by leading the Lama to the theatre of war actually allows Kim to fulfill the duties of his position as chela by defending the Lama. Acting as a good chela, in turn, makes possible the conclusion of his Game mission. His conflicting
responsibilities are magically aligned and made interdependent: it seems that Kim has no choice but to have his cake, and eat it too.

The novel seems intent on obviating the need for Kim to choose between roles. We might say that Kim is used by the novel to demonstrate the possibility of harmonizing two very different systems, but two systems which share a belief in hierarchical order. Like Lurgan and the Lama, Kim is a vehicle for a grand design that he doesn't fully understand, a grand design that encompasses both the Game and Buddhism. Unlike the scenes in the Wonder House, imperialism does not figure as the caretaker of Buddhism at the end of the novel. What emerges is a more pluralistic mutual absorption.

Franklin suggests that the novel’s overarching philosophy can be read in line with the concept of dependent origination which underlies most, if not all, Buddhist thought. The concept is based on “a model of reality in its entirety,” a model that incorporates the chain of causes and effects that govern all existence (154). The image of the Wheel (the center of the altercation between the Lama and the Russian) “is a model of the operation of karma depicting the processes of cause and effect by which human desire, ignorance, and avarice lead to a potentially endless cycle of rebirth, suffering, and death from lifetime to lifetime” (154). If everything in the universe is subject to the law of causes and effects, then everything is interrelated, and nothing and no one is atomized. The Game does not have to be played according to geo-political conquest, which leads to imperialist harm. For Kim, it can be a vehicle for releasing good causes into the world that will produce good consequences. The chela mentality can become a philosophy informing the way Kim conducts himself in The Great Game; a particular rank in one system of hierarchy can become a style of being in another. In this way, the Game itself might become a vehicle for something it did not anticipate when played by a worthy chela.

Because “processes causally interact with one another in complex ways,” a given effect can have multiple causes, and for a given cause, there can be multiple effects (Franklin 155). Thus, Franklin concludes that Kipling wants us to “be mindful of the complexity of causes and effects in this novel, as in the hybrid world of colonial India, as in life in general” (156). I prefer to delimit the rule of causes and effects to the world of colonial India, and in addition, emphasize that the rule works to describe that world only as it is portrayed in Kim. But I do think that by the end of the novel, we are meant to see the dichotomy of Great Game and Buddhist Way as “co-dependent” rather than “categorical,” to borrow Franklin’s terms (158), or as a kind of hybrid organic social model. The novel’s avowed pluralism, however, does not indicate a turn toward disinterestedness about the survival of the British Empire on Kipling’s part. The ideal model for an Indian future may be one in which imperial and indigenous systems are co-dependent, but a wise, benevolent, and unequivocally British curator-Sahib at the head of such a model is nonetheless indispensable. In order to be a good caretaker, however, that Sahib may need to stop thinking like a curator and start acting like a good chela.
Appendix: The Story of the Elephant with the Leg-Iron (as told to Kim by the Lama)

‘Long and long ago, when Devadatta was King of Benares—let all listen to the Jâtaka!—an elephant was captured for a time by the king’s hunters and ere he broke free, beringed with a grievous leg-iron. This he strove to remove with hate and frenzy in his heart, and hurrying up and down the forests, besought his brother-elephants to wrench it asunder. One by one, with their strong trunks, they tried and failed. At the last they gave it as their opinion that the ring was not to be broken by any bestial power. And in a thicket, new-born, wet with moisture of birth, lay a day-old calf of the herd whose mother had died. The fettered elephant, forgetting his own agony, said: “If I do not help this suckling it will perish under our feet.” So he stood above the young thing, making his legs buttresses against the uneasily moving herd; and he begged milk of a virtuous cow, and the calf thrived, and the ringed elephant was the calf’s guide and defence. Now the days of an elephant—let all listen to the Jâtaka!—are thirty-five years to his full strength, and through thirty-five Rains the ringed elephant befriended the younger, and all the while the fetter ate into the flesh.

Then one day the young elephant saw the half-buried iron, and turning to the elder said: “What is this?” “It is even my sorrow,” said he who had befriended him. Then that other put out his trunk and in the twinkling of an eyelash abolished the ring, saying: “The appointed time has come.” So the virtuous elephant who had waited temperately and done kind acts was relieved, at the appointed time, by the very calf whom he had turned aside to cherish—let all listen to the Jâtaka!—for the Elephant was Ananda, and the Calf that broke the ring was none other than The Lord Himself.’

Then he [the Lama] would shake his head benignly, and over the ever-clicking rosary point out how free that elephant-calf was from the sin of pride. He was as humble as a chela who, seeing his master sitting in the dust outside the Gates of Learning, over-leapt the gates (though they were locked) and took his master to his heart in the presence of the proud-stomached city. Rich would be the reward of such a master and such a chela when the time came for them to seek freedom together!

(Kim 165-66)
Works Cited